

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, YE

SUBJECT: THE TRIBAL "FACTS" IN YEMEN

REF: SANA 3016

1. SUMMARY: ON OCT 31, TURKI BIN FEISAL BIN ABDAL AZIZ (FROM KAMEL ADHAM'S OFFICE IN JIDDA) ARRIVED UNEXPECTEDLY IN SANA FOR WHAT WAS DESCRIBED AS A "FACT-FINDING MISSION" INSPIRED BY DISCONTENT OF ABDALLAH BIN HUSSAIN AL-AHMAR AND SOME TRIBES. REFTEL GAVE FIRST EMBASSY ASSESSMENT OF MATTER, PRIOR TO TURKIS ARRIVAL. WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN UPDATE AND EXPANSION OF THE TRIBAL "FACTS" OF YEMEN-- AS WE SEE THEM.

2. SEEMS CLEAR TO US THAT DEGREE OF TRIBAL UNREST AT PRESENT IS NOT RPT NOT VERY GREAT. SAUDIS MAY BE MISINFORMED THIS MATTER. EYEWITNESS WHO RETURNED TWO DAYS AGO FROM SAADA STATES THAT AIRPORT THERE VERY MUCH IN GOVT HANDS, OFFICIALS IN CITY NOT UNDER ANY APPARENT PRESSURE, AND NO REPORTS OF FIGHTING IN AREA. GOVT DETACHMENT WENT TO SAADA BY AIR. OUR TRAVELLER TO SAADA SAYS HE SAW "CAMPFIRES" ON HILLS TO SOUTH OF CITY SO THERE MAY WELL HAVE BEEN ARMED TRIBAL LEVIES ON THE MOVE. ON OTHER HAND, THOUGH TRIBAL ROADBLOCKS EXIST ON ROAD TO SAADA, ROAD IS RPT IS OPEN. WE HAVE ONLY ONE REPORT OF FIGHTING AND THAT INVOLVES ONE AIRSTRIP BETWEEN TRIBES, NOT BETWEEN TRIBES AND GOVT.

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NEVERTHELESS CERTAIN REPORTS FROM SAUDI ARABIA HAVE

SAADA TRIBES IN REVOLT UNDER LEADERSHIP OF ABDALLAH.
THREE TRIBES INCIDENTIALLY (SAHAR, KHAULAN ASH SHAM AND DAHM)
ARE ALL BAKIL RATHER THAN HASHID, AND THUS NOT DIRECTLY
IN LIEGE TO ABDALLAH, WHO PARAMOUNT SHAYKH OF HASHID CONFEDERATION.

3. IT IRONIC THAT ABDALLAY, PARAMOUNT SHAYKH OF HASHID
CONFEDERATION SHOULD HAVE TO APPEAL TO BAKIL TRIBES. HASHID WAS
ALWAYS IMPORTANT IN PAST BECAUSE IT CONTROLLED AREA IMMEDIATELY
AROUND SANAA-THROUGH HAMDAN, BANI HUSHAYAH SANHAN AND BANI
HARITH TRIBES. THERE IS HOWEVER, VIRTUALLY NO RPT NO
UNREST IN THESE AREAS, WHICH ARE GETTING PLENTY OF SPILLOVER
FROM DEVELOPMENT OF SANA AND SEE THEIR FUTURE CLEARLY IN TERMS
OF IOOPERATION WITH GOVT RATHER THAN REVOLT AGAINST IT.
IT ALSO HELPS THAT CHIEF OF STAFF OF ARMED FORCES,
AHMED AL-GHASHMI, IS BROTHER OF PARAMOUNT SHAYKH OF POWERFUL
HAMDAN AND, IN WORDS OF ONE CAUSTIC OBSERVER, A BIGGER
SHAYKH IN HIS OWN RIGHT THAN SHAYKH ABDALLAH.

4. BAKIL TRIBES, HOWEVER, ARE MORE NUMEROUS AND WILDER THAN
HASHID, AND LED WEAKLY BY INEBRIATE WHO RARELY STIRS FROM SANA.
IF ABDALLAH IOULD MOBILIZE THEM THEY WOULD POST SERIOUS THREAT
TO ANY REGIME IN SANA. HAMDI, HAS THEREFORE GIVEN THEM FEW
PRETEXTS. HE DOES NOT RPT NOT IMPRISON OR EXECUTE TRIBAL
LEADERS, AS OTHER YEMENI REGIMES HAVE DONE, AND HE IS
MAKING AN EFFORT TO GET DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OUT TO THE
COUNTRYSIDE. HE HAS ALSO TRIED TO MOVE THE SAUDIS INTO CUTTING
BACK ON SUBSIDIES TO TRIBES AND INCREASING SUBSIDIES TO
CENTRAL GOVT, WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT SANA GOVT, WILL
FUNNEL MORE RESOURCES INTO NORTHEAST. THIS EFFORT WITH SAUDIS
HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL. FACED WITH GOVT WHICH GIVING
MORE THAN IT TAXED, AND WITHOUT SAUDI MONEY TO STIMULATE
MERCENARY MARTIAL INSTINCTS, OR BLOOD DEBTS TO REVENGE,
TRIBES HAVE NO REASON TO RISE. EXISTENCE OF PARLIAMENT--AND
ABDALLAH'S JOB--DOESN'T MATTER A FIG BY COMPARISON.

5. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT ABDALLAH HAS FAILED TO WIN MUCH
SUPPORT EVEN FROM USAYMAT, HIS OWN BRANCH OF HASHID
CONFEDERATION OF WHICH HE IS NOMINALLY PARAMOUNT SHAYKH.
USAYMAT ARE FROM KHAMR, WHERE ABDALLAH HELD TRIBAL MEETING LAST
WEEK. AT SAME TIME KAHMR, ITSELF, COMPLETELY CONTROLLED BY
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ABDALLAH'S FORCES. HASHID TRIBE, WHICH NEXT DOOR TO USAYMAT,
ALSO VERY SPLIT, WITH A FEW GROUPS HOWEVER SUPPORTING ABDALLAH.

6. KHAMR MEETING, AS REPORTED REFTTEL, BROUGHT REPS FROM BAKIL
AS WELL AS HASHID, PRODUCED NO RPT NO CONSENSUS FOR ACTION
AGAINST GOVT, ALTHOUGH SOME TRIBES OR SUB-GROUPS WERE RPT
WERE WILLING TO ACCEPT ABDALLAH'S CALL FOR SUCH ACTION. SHOULD
BE UNDERSCORED, HOWEVER, THAT MANY TRIBES HAVE NOT RPT NOT

MADE FIRM DECISION WHETHER OR NOT SUPPORT ABDALLAH AND MUST STILL BE VIEWED AS STRADDLING THE FENCE.

7. NOTWITHSTANDING LACK OF EARLY SUCCESS, ABDALLAH CONTINUED TO SEE OTHER MEETINGS, AND IN VISIT TO SANA ON FRIDAY NOV 1-- WHEN HE FIRST MET TURKI-HE REPORTEDLY HAD LETTERS FOR KHAULAN AL-TIYYAL, IMPORTANT BAKIL TRIBE JUST TO SOUTH OF SANA. HE MAY BE TRYING TO CONTACT OTHER CENTRAL REGION TRIBES LIKE KHAULAN, WHICH HAVE NOT YET NOT SUPPORTED HIM EVEN TO LIMITED EXTENT OF EASTERN AND NORTHERN GROUPS.

COMMENT: OUR ASSESSMENT THEREFORE IS THAT ABDALLAH HAS TRIED IN LAST TWO WEEKS--AND FAILED--TO INCITE TRIBES AGAINST GOVT. HE WANTED INSURRECTION, WITH LARGE AREAS OF COUNTRYSIDE IN NORTH CLOSED TO GOVT AND OTHER TRAFFIC. BUT, SO FAR AS WE CAN SEE, NEITHER HASHID NOR BAKIL HAVE RESPONDED. ROAD TO HODEIDA AND TAIZ WERE NEVER IN QUESTION, AND ROAD TO NORTHERN CITY OF SAADA REMAINS OPEN. SAUDIS MAY NOT REALIZE LIMITED EXTENT OF ABDALLAH'S SWAY IN COUNTRYSIDE, AND MAY HAVE CONCLUDED FROM SOME OF THEIR INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT MAJOR UPRISING WAS IN MAKING. THIS IS CLEARLY WRONG BUT WE WONDER IF TURKI'S FACT-FINDING MISSION REACHING THE SAME CONCLUSION.
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